Innovation(Bid'a) in the light of the Sunnah of the Prophet(s.a.w.) Concerning New matters.

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The Prophet(s.a.w.)said,.. "Beware of matters newly begun,for every innovation is misguidance."

Beware of matters newly begun

(Muhammad al-Jurdani:) meaning, "Distance yourselves and be wary of matters newly innovated that did not previously exist," that is, invented in Islam that contravene the Shari'ah,

for every innovation is misguidance

meaning that every innovation is the opposite of the truth, i.e. falsehood, a hadith that has been related elsewhere as: *for every newly begun matter is innovation, every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in hell*

meaning that everyone who is misguided, whether through himself or by following another, is in hell, the hadith referring to matters that are not good innovations with a basis in Shari'ah. It has been stated by (**Izzuddeen ibn Abdus Salaam**) that innovations (bid'a) fall under the five headings of Islamic Law (i.e. the obligatory, unlawful, recommended, offensive and permissible):

(1) The first category comprises of innovations that are *obligatory*, such as recording the Qur'aan and laws of Islam in writing when it was feared that something might be lost from them; the study of the disciplines of Arabic that are necessary to understand the Qur'aan and sunnah such as grammer, word declension and lexicography; hadith classification to distinguish between genuine and spurious prophetic traditions; and the philosophical refutations of arguments advanced by the Mu'tazilites.

(2) The second category is that of unlawful innovations such as non-Islamic taxes and levies, giving positions of authority in Shari'ah to those unfit for them, and devoting one's time to learning the beliefs of heretical sects that contravene the tenets of faith of the Ahlus Sunnah.

(3) The third category consists of recommended innovations such as building hostels and schools of Islamic law,recording the research of Islamic schools of legal thought,writing books on beneficial subjects, extensive research into fundamentals and particular applications of the Shari'ah, indepth studies of Arabic linguistics, the reciting of wirds (i.e. daily amount of dhikr) by those on the Sufi path, and **commemorating** the **birth** (**mawlid**) of the Prophet(s.a.w.) and **wearing one's best and rejoicing at it.**

(4) The fourth category includes innovations that are *offensive*, such as embellishing mosques, decorating the Qur'aan, and having a backup man (muballigh) loudly repeat the spoken Allahu Akbar of

the imam when the latter’s voice is already clearly audible to those praying behind him.

(5) The fifth category is that of innovations that are *permissible*, such as sifting flour, using spoons, and having more enjoyable food, drink and housing.

[‘Abdullah Muhammad al-Ghimari:] In his al-Qawa’id al kubra, **Izzuddeen ibn Abdus Salaam** classifies innovations (bid’a), according to their benefit, harm or indifference, into the five categories of rulings: the obligatory, recommended, unlawful, offensive, and permissible; giving examples of each and mentioning the principles of Shari’ah that verify his classification. His words on the subject display his keen insight and comprehensive knowledge of both the principles of jurisprudence and the human advantages and disadvantages in view of which the Lawgiver has established the rulings of the Shari’ah.

Because his classification of innovation (bid’a) was established on a firm basis in Islamic jurisprudence and legal principles, it was confirmed by Imam Nawawi, Ibn Hajar ‘Asqalani, and the vast majority of Islamic scholars, who received his words with acceptance and viewed it obligatory to apply them to new events and contingencies that occur with the changing times and the peoples who live in them.

Now, there are a great number of hadiths, most of them in the rigorously authenticated (**sagheeg**) collections, showing that many of the prophetic companions initiated new acts, forms of invocation (thikr), supplications (du’a’), and so on, that the Prophet(s.a.w.) had never previously done or ordered to be done.Rather, the companions did them because of their inference and conviction that such acts were of the good that Islam and the Prophet of Islam came with and in general terms urge the like of to be done, in accordance with the **word of Allah**,

“And do good that haply you may succeed.” (22:77)

and the **hadith** of the Prophet(s.a.w.),

“He who inaugurates a good Sunnah in Islam earns the reward of it and all who performs it after him without diminishing their own rewards in the slightest.”

Though the original context of the hadith was for giving charity, the interpretive principle established by scholarly consensus of specialists in the fundamentals of the Shari’ah is that the point of the primary text lies in the generality of their lexical significance, not the specificity of their historical context, without this implying that just anyone may make provisions in the Shari’ah, for Islam is defined by principles and criteria, such that whatever one initiates as a Sunnah must be subject to its rules, strictures and primary textual evidence.

From this investigative point of departure, one may observe that many of the companions performed various acts through their own personal reasoning (**ijtihad**), *and that the Sunnah and way of the Prophet(s.a.w.) was both to accept those that were acts of worship and good deeds conformable with what the Sacred Law(Shari’ah) had*

established and not in conflict with it; and to reject those which were otherwise.

This was his Sunnah and way, upon which his caliphal successors and companions proceeded, and from which Islamic scholars have established the rule that any new matter must be judged according to the principles and primary text of the **Shari'ah**: whatever is attested to by law as being **good** is acknowledge as good, and whatever is attested to by law as being a **contravention and bad** is rejected as a blameworthy innovation (bid'a).

They sometimes term the former a good innovation (bid'a ghasana) in view of it lexically being term an innovation, but legally speaking it is not really an innovation but rather an *inferable Sunnah* as long as the primary texts of the Shari'ah attest to it being acceptable.

Conclusion:

The only reason that Islamic law can be valid for every time and place and be the consummate and most perfect of all divine laws is because it comprises of general methodological principles and universal criteria, together with the ability its scholars have been endowed with to understand its primary texts, the knowledge of types of analogy and parallelism, and the other excellences that characterize it. Were we to rule that every new act that has come into being after the first century of Islam as an innovation of misguidance without considering whether it entails Benefit or Harm, *it would invalidate a large share of the fundamental bases of the Shari'ah as well as those rulings established by analogical reasoning, and would narrow and limit the Shari'ah's vast and comprehensive scope.*